

**Changing Adaptive Strategies of the *Ėso* and *Ogwe'pi*:  
Ethnohistoric Hunters and Gatherers in the Southern Great Basin**

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## Introduction

Steward's (1938) thesis on *Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Sociopolitical Groups* has been a cornerstone for theories of evolutionary change and models of prehistoric hunter - gatherer adaptations throughout the world. Although published almost six decades ago, this work continues to exert considerable influence on how archaeologists interpret the archaeological record of hunters and gatherers and apply those interpretation to questions of evolutionary change. Thomas (1996) has noted that this continued applicability of the so-called Steward's model, which he tested against the archaeological of the Reese River Valley (Thomas, 1973), is perhaps because Steward, like the ethnoarchaeologists of today, addressed those aspects of hunter-gatherer adaptations (patterns of settlement and subsistence) which were more likely to be recorded in the archaeological record and most directly applicable to archaeological theories of evolutionary processes. It is little wonder, then, why archaeologists continue to use Steward's model of Western Shoshone life ways as a direct analog of prehistoric hunters and gatherers. Catherine Fowler (1982a) has reviewed and evaluated the ethnographic base from which Steward derived his settlement and subsistence model. She concluded that although Steward's generalized model of ethnographic adaptations was certainly valid and useful for archaeological analyses, the actualized patterns of groups in any one particular setting was obviously more complex and suggested that perhaps it was time for archaeologists to pay more attention to actualized patterns. Thomas (1981) and Eggan (1980) also noted the great variability that existed between Great Basin ethnographic groups and suggested that this variability might reflect the "subtle processes of the microevolution of sociopolitical complexity" (Thomas, 1981:49; also see Thomas, Pendleton and Cappannari, 1986:278-279). But, Thomas (1982:166) also points out that "when one examines the data, it becomes clear how little we actually know about Numic archaeology." This paper examines the archaeological record of one particular group studied by Steward (1938) - the Beatty and Belted Range Shoshone. In this regard, it addresses Fowler's call for such particularistic studies. However, if the variability exhibited among Numic groups do represent different stages on a microevolutionary scale as argued by Thomas, then this particularistic study must also address the larger questions of how the ethnohistoric adaptations of the Beatty and Belted Range Shoshone reflect the processes of cultural evolution (Leonard 1993).

Steward's (1937, 1938, 1941) ethnographic work among the Western Shoshone was not conducted until well after the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Tonopah-Goldfield-Bullfrog mining boom and by that time, changes in their lifestyles had been so substantial that he found it necessary to use a "memory" approach that focused on a synchronic slice of the lives of his informant's parents and grandparents.

Service 1962:94-99; Thomas 1973). Archaeology is poised to play a pivotal role in such cultural contact studies as it provides not only a temporal baseline that spans both prehistory and history, but also the means to study the processes of cultural change (Lightfoot 1995; Spores 1980; Trigger 1986; Wilson and Rogers 1993). Through comparing and evaluating what is known from the archaeological, ethnographic and historic records of the Beatty and Belted Range Shoshone perhaps we can gain an insight to the changes that occurred in their adaptive systems during ethnohistoric times and relate those changes to processes of cultural evolution.

Steward (1940, 1951) recognized and evaluated the acculturation of the Western Shoshone into the newly developing American society. He (Steward, 1951) argued that this sociocultural integration occurred in different levels of society rather than on the society as a whole. According to Steward (1951:133) the "Western Shoshone were spared the more crucial difficulties experienced by Indians who had a fairly tightly-woven fabric of community culture." With their hunting and gathering resources partly destroyed, acculturation consisted primarily of incorporating wage labor and some material culture (dress, housing, transportation, food, etc.) into their existing nomadic life style. However, the Western Shoshone retained many beliefs pertaining to kinship relations, child rearing, shamanism, supernatural powers and magic, and recreation. Steward (1951:134) argued that

Little Ice Age). Our chronological controls for prehistoric sites on Pahute and Rainier mesas are not sufficient to detect any changes in the adaptive strategies that might have accompanied this brief period of glacial advance, but the overall shift in residential mobility to the logistic monitoring the mesa's resources from residential bases located off the mesas obviously continued as it was.

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